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ABSTRACT

This report examines the ways in which a community college can engage the faculty in its academic planning. Metropolitan Community College (MCC) (Nebraska) has developed an academic planning process that involves faculty in strategic dialogue, strengthens relationships with critical areas in the college, and synchronizes college-wide strategic planning. The key to the academic planning process for MCC was the development of a common model to guide the discussions. A set of five key learning initiatives was identified after facilitating a series of faculty conversations about the future. These learning initiatives were defined as follows: mission driven; learner centered; curriculum focused; partnership rich; and inclusive culture. This framework was then used to guide department planning meetings. Concurrently, the college was engaged in an overall strategic planning process to identify strategic initiatives as well. While a number of results were tangible in identifying priorities for the area and programs, earmarking budget dollars for key action plans and providing directions for grants and fundraising, the most important result may have been more intangible. The extensive involvement of faculty, the richness of the dialogue, and the visible documentation of the process resulted in a renewed sense of energy about the future. Attachment includes academic planning document. (JA)

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A Framework for Academic Planning:
Engaging faculty in strategic dialogue

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Introduction

The planning literature is full of strategic planning models for institutions (Steiner 1979, Cope 1981, 1987, Mintzberg 1994, Peterson 1998) but is fairly limited for community colleges specifically. Even more limited is the academic planning literature, which is almost non-existent for community colleges. So how does a community college Chief Academic Officer engage the faculty in thinking about their role, their programs and the future of their institution?

Operating in a dynamic external environment requires educational institutions, and community colleges in particular, to engage in thinking about the future in meaningful ways. This reality is affirmed by Alfred and Carter (1997) as they posit that changes in increased competition and accountability require organizational structures, systems, cultures, roles, and relationships to be defined not by tradition and comfort but by competitive opportunities that provide strategic advantages for community colleges. So how does an academic officer tap the creativity of the faculty in identifying these competitive opportunities and strategic advantages? Metropolitan Community College in Omaha Nebraska has developed an academic planning process that engages faculty in strategic dialogue, strengthens relationships with critical areas in the College and synchronizes with college-wide strategic planning.

Process

The key to the academic planning process for MCC was the development of a common model to guide the discussions. Entitled, "Learning is Our Purpose: A

Framework for Academic Planning", a set of five key learning initiatives were identified after facilitating a series of faculty conversations about the future. These learning initiatives were defined as follows:

1. **Mission Driven**: We will fulfill the comprehensive, open-door mission of MCC.
2. **Learner-Centered**: We will develop systems and processes based on the needs of learners in an effort to enhance the teaching and learning process.
3. **Curriculum Focused**: We will develop sustainable systems related to curriculum development that allow for the creative design and delivery of relevant curriculum and programs.
4. **Partnership Rich**: We will develop and maintain partnerships with other agencies to create learning opportunities and add value for the students we serve.
5. **Inclusive Culture**: We will develop a culture based on inclusiveness, professionalism and integrity.

This framework was then used to guide department-planning meetings during a period in December and January. The planning meetings were facilitated by the Chief Academic Officer and were generally two hours in length. Questions were developed for each learning initiative with slight modification toward the individual needs of the 17 academic departments. More than 120 of the 175 full-time faculty participated in the discussions.

While the Educational Services division of the College was undergoing this process, the Director of Facilities was also charged with updating the College's strategic facility master plan. He attended all 17 academic department meetings and facilitated the last 30-40 minutes of each meeting, asking questions that were short-term in nature (e.g., what needs to be fixed now to support learning?) and also more strategic in terms of the possibilities for facilities (i.e., program adjacencies, new buildings, major

remodels, etc.). This provided an opportunity for faculty to share their ideas, concerns, and dreams regarding the facilities of the College and to think about the learning environment in general. Extensive notes were taken during this period and the faculty input was then infused into the facilities master planning process with the local Board of Governors.

The summary of each department meeting was then drafted into a one-page Planning Guidesheet. These guidesheets were distributed to faculty in draft form for feedback, which was then used to finalize the plans. A set of action items were identified for all areas (i.e., outcomes assessment, curriculum delivery, etc.) and combined with the 17 department planning guidesheets to create a 25-page planning document (Attachment A). This summary plan was then shared with all full-time faculty, made available to part-time faculty, and discussed with other key constituents within the College.

Concurrently, the College was engaged in an overall strategic planning process to identify strategic initiatives as well. Each major area of the College was to identify between one and three key action plans that in some way supported one of the five strategic initiatives for the College. Through the academic planning process, a total of 21 general action items were identified with three being clearly marked as the key action plans for inclusion in the College's strategic plan: Curriculum systems development, part-time faculty support systems, and program promotion. Specific implementation steps were then identified for these three plans.

Results & Benefits

The document was the first compilation of academic planning discussions at this level of faculty dialogue. It represents a tangible, visible documentation of administration listening closely to faculty ideas and perspectives. Having the process occur in December and January allowed for the planning process to create more focus during the budget development in the spring. Associate Deans had specific items to guide and filter budget requests from faculty as well as earmark specific dollars for the key action plans.

Shortly after the planning process and document were completed, the College's foundation board asked about key priorities for the educational programs at the College that might influence fundraising activity at the College. A brief review of the academic planning document resulted in easily extracting three or four major priorities (i.e., underserved populations, equipment, etc.) and a number of possibilities (i.e., expansion of the Visual Arts programs, etc.). Similarly, priorities were also easily gleaned to provide direction for the grants office and the pursuit of new grants to advance the instructional area of the College.

While a number of results were quite tangible in identifying priorities for the area and programs, earmarking budget dollars for key action plans and providing direction for grants and fundraising, the most important result may have been more intangible. The extensive involvement of faculty, the richness of the dialogue, and the visible documentation of the process resulted in a renewed sense of energy about the

future and a belief among the faculty that the future was something they could help proactively shape rather than simply reactively survive.

Challenges

Although the inclusion of the facilities staff was valuable, a future challenge will be to include other important areas in joint planning efforts. The current intent is to have the Dean of Students take the place of the facilities director in joining all of the faculty department meetings to discuss faculty issues related to student services. Subsequently, the Director of Technology Enhanced Learning and Director of Information Technology will join the process in the following third year to enrich the dialogue regarding technology. A significant challenge is making this process sustainable by involving other areas of the College to continue adding meaning and value to the planning process.

Finally, a primary limitation of this process is that it does not provide many specifics. Since this was the first extensive academic planning process completed at the College, the focus was on capturing the creative dialogue and not on creating tasks and timelines. The final document is simply a compilation of possibilities and therefore lacks the traditional matrix of deadlines and responsibilities.

After the first three-year cycle is complete, it will be important to take the process to the next level by moving from a list of creative poss.bilities to one identifying clear priorities and action items for each academic department.

References

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Mintzberg, Henry. (1994). The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning. New York: The Free Press.

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Attachment A

Academic Planning Document

- Cover
- Introduction with Key Action Plans
- Learning Initiatives with Objectives
- Sample Department Planning Guidesheets

A Framework for Academic Planning

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Metropolitan Community College 2001-2003

10

Cover design by Lori Rhode ~ Metropolitan Community College GCA student

Metropolitan Community College

Mission

Metropolitan Community College's mission is to serve a diverse community of life-long learners by providing quality educational opportunities.

Purposes

- MCC provides affordable and accessible learning-centered developmental, occupational, academic transfer, and continuing education programs.
- MCC promotes excellence in teaching and learning.
- MCC builds and strengthens community partnerships.
- MCC demonstrates fiscal and academic accountability.

Core Values

Value diversity
Take the initiative
Pursue excellence
Promote teamwork
Conduct all business with integrity
Remain open to creativity and innovation
Serve through leadership, lead through service
Strive toward learning centeredness in all services
Be accountable to students, colleagues and the community
Solve problems using solution seeking attitudes and systems approaches
Continuously strive to improve interpersonal and organizational communication

Strategic Initiatives 2001-2003

- Enhance and expand learning-centered education
- Be a leading learning resource
- Create and improve flexible learning support systems
- Optimize partnerships
- Provide personal and professional growth opportunities

Educational Services Vision
Developing human potential through the power of learning and community.

Planning Process

In March 2000 faculty participated in an interactive session focused on questions related to strategic issues and planning processes. Based on the output from those sessions and College Council environmental scanning summaries, a framework for academic planning was created. This framework is guided by five learning initiatives that support the strategic direction of the College. During the winter quarter 2000-01, faculty participated in department discussions considering the learning initiatives and opportunities that may arise during the next few years. In addition, facilities staff joined all 17 department discussions to solicit faculty input on facilities needs and other ideas for enhancing the learning environment as part of updating the College's facilities educational plan.

Discussion summaries were drafted and shared with faculty for feedback and refinement. The results of this process are included in this document and are meant to be used as a guide for Educational Services activities for the next two to three years. The process has been one of open, considered dialogue; one through which we have collectively begun to create our future.

Action Plans

As part of the larger MCC Strategic Plan 2001-2003, Educational Services' three primary areas of focus will be developed around curriculum systems, part-time faculty support and program promotion.

Curriculum

Develop and implement a sustainable system for the on-going review, development, and delivery of curriculum.

Part-time faculty support

Develop and implement a comprehensive support system for part time faculty that will provide for consistent practices in hiring, orienting, training and evaluating performance; foster enhanced communication and facilitate regular interaction with full time faculty and other College staff members.

Program Promotion

Collaborate with Marketing & Public Relations and Student Services to develop an integrated approach to program promotion.

Educational Services Learning Initiatives

Activities listed under each learning initiative represent those efforts that will require collaboration across departments and may have a college-wide impact. The remainder of the plan consists of planning guidesheets, which are intended to capture the creative possibilities that reside in each academic department.

MISSION DRIVEN

Career education: Fully develop a Technical Academy for industrial trades programs by offering coordinated dual credit opportunities to interested area high school students.

General education: Refine the definition, purpose, and assessment of the General Education core degree requirements.

Developmental education: Implement the objectives of the Title III grant as a collaborative effort between Educational Services and Student Services to strengthen systems, curriculum options and support services for all students with developmental needs.

CURRICULUM FOCUSED

Curriculum design: Develop and implement a sustainable system for the on-going review, development, and delivery of curriculum.

Program planning: Continue strengthening the alignment of MCC's scheduling processes with student needs.

***Assessment of student learning*:** Redefine the Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning in the context of a larger Institutional Effectiveness Plan and implement the updated plan accordingly.

LEARNER CENTERED

Curriculum delivery:

- Based on Council recommendations, refine the structure and support of Weekend College offerings.
- Collaborate with Student & Instructional Services/Instructional Design Services and other areas of the College to assure a comprehensive approach to the development of alternatively delivered courses.

Learning communities: Continue developing existing learning communities like AIM for Success and Get Into IT and develop new learning communities (i.e., Honors Cohort, fast-track, etc.).

Learning environments:

- Create expectations for a learning environment and communicate to MCC students.
- Pursue opportunities to expand the definition of the learning environment and participate in the development of an updated Facility Educational Plan.

PARTNERSHIP RICH

Secondary education: Continue the appropriate expansion of articulation efforts with high schools to provide learning opportunities through dual credit and tech prep agreements.

Postsecondary education: Continue refining existing articulation agreements with colleges and universities in addition to actively pursuing new agreements where they do not currently exist. Additionally, continue coordination efforts with other Nebraska community colleges.

Public & Private sectors: Expand strategic partnerships by refining systems in support of existing program-specific advisory committees and create new advisory committees for appropriate general education departments.

INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Faculty support:

- Formalize a professional development program and increased support for recently hired full-time faculty.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive support system for part time faculty that will provide for consistent practices in hiring, orienting, training and evaluating performance; foster enhanced communication and facilitate regular interaction with full time faculty and other College staff members.

Enrollment & program packaging: Collaborate with Marketing & Public Relations and Student Services to develop an integrated approach to program promotion.

Inclusive culture: Through task force recommendations and other means, examine organizational systems and structures and their ability to meet student and college needs.

Sample

Building Trades

~ Learning is Our Purpose ~

Planning Guidesheet 2001-2003

Architectural Drafting & Design **Civil Engineering Technology**
Construction Technology **Air Conditioning/Heating & Refrigeration**

MISSION DRIVEN

- Work with Workforce Development to clarify roles and strengthen communication.
- Continue and possibly expand continuing education offerings on weekends as introductory sessions to programs (particularly construction).
- Work with student services to increase coordination of program advisement (particularly sequencing in architectural drafting).
- Consider the relationship between general education and the applied nature of career programs in the building trades.

CURRICULUM FOCUSED

- Work with advisory committees to redefine occupational specialist diplomas to become more outcome-based.
- Find ways to formalize opportunities to collaborate on curriculum development across programs within the department.
- Explore opportunities to identify common curriculum within the department and perhaps offering sections to meet the needs of multiple programs (i.e., blueprint reading, etc.) as well as other interdisciplinary possibilities.
- Consider the development of an introductory course that could be required for all students in the building trades programs.
- Explore potential offerings in environmental engineering.

PARTNERSHIP RICH

- Consider the creation of a single advisory committee for the Building Trades that could accent the individual program advisory committees.
- Strengthen relationship with the Construction Specifications Institute.
- Maintain awareness of emerging technologies and the identification of potential partners.
- Strengthen communication regarding tech prep and the building trades.

INCLUSIVE CULTURE

- Find ways to formalize and strengthen communication with part-time faculty.
- Increase support to continue avenues that have created growth (e.g. Construction).

LEARNER CENTERED

- Refine sequential issues in curriculum (e.g., architectural drafting)
- Find ways to repackage delivery to better connect with local high schools.

Sample

Business

~ Learning is Our Purpose ~

Planning Guidesheet 2001-2003

Accounting Economics Insurance Marketing Management Legal Assistant Real Estate

MISSION DRIVEN

- Continue working with the Workforce Development Institute to provide customized training opportunities for local businesses (i.e., Ameritrade, First Data, Lozier, First National Bank, etc.).
- Work more closely with student services to advise students about the relationship and benefits to bundling Business and Computer associate degrees and certificates.
- Consider relationship to Continuing Education program offerings and build on commonalities where they exist.

CURRICULUM FOCUSED

- Continue pursuing curriculum integration possibilities between Business and Computer Technology.
- Investigate modularizing curriculum components to market and offer program modules to local businesses.
- Continue developing the Personal Investment degree option.
- Pursue E-Business interdisciplinary associate degree program.
- Explore possibilities with the National Association of Credit Management for offerings in international business and credit management.

PARTNERSHIP RICH

- Revisit business transfer degree articulation agreements to include FIN 201, business-technical writing and intermediate accounting.
- Pursue additional articulations with other colleges and universities (i.e., UNL).
- Investigate the creation of a more student-centered process for students to access internships.

INCLUSIVE CULTURE

- Strengthen the opportunities for part-time faculty to interact with full-time faculty in the department as well as increasing the instructional resources available to part-time faculty (i.e., web access, etc.)
- Maintain the strong retention rate of part-time faculty in the Business Department.

LEARNER CENTERED

- Continue developing personal investment and accounting II courses for online delivery.
- Support refinements to Weekend College offerings including Business degree options.

Global Languages

Sample

~ Learning is Our Purpose ~

Planning Guidesheet 2001-2003

English as a Second Language **French** **German**
Japanese **Sign Language** **Spanish**

MISSION DRIVEN

- Strengthen the bridge between credit and non-credit ESL programs.
- Work closely with the Workforce Development Institute to maintain standards when customizing credit curriculum for business and industry.
- Consider going beyond serving the immigrant populations for ESL and supporting increased international student populations.
- Work with student services staff to increase connections between upper-level ESL students and transitioning into trades programs at MCC.

CURRICULUM FOCUSED

- Explore further development of American Sign Language (ASL) Studies and interpreting studies (perhaps for multiple languages).
- Continue developing interpreting classes (multiple languages) for health care.
- Increase consistency throughout the Sign Language curriculum.
- Continue developing conversational skills and special topics curriculum in both Spanish and ESL.
- Strengthen curriculum development for French and Japanese similar to efforts made in the German language curriculum.
- Explore potential for developing Vietnamese and Sudanese language curricula.
- Consider pairing language courses with history courses, particularly Spanish and Sign Language (separate deaf culture and deaf history curricula).

PARTNERSHIP RICH

- Continue working with UNO to increase transferability of all languages.
- Pursue opportunities to offer languages to area high school seniors, particularly telecourses.
- Pursue grant funding for curriculum development in global languages.

INCLUSIVE CULTURE

- Create more flexibility in compensation and load limitations for part-time faculty.
- Find ways to formalize connections and support for part-time faculty.
- Create more space for part-time faculty.

LEARNER CENTERED

- Explore on-line development of Spanish classes.
- Pursue intensive delivery format for all languages.
- Expand ESL to television format delivery similar to "crossroads café" program.
- Expand ASL and interpreting classes for evening offerings.

Sample

Manufacturing Trades

~ Learning is Our Purpose ~

Planning Guidesheet 2001-2003

Drafting & Design for Manufacturing Industrial Maintenance
Welding Technology

MISSION DRIVEN

- The programs benefit from having a general education component required for all of the associate degrees. However, given the current computer skill level of many new students, explore ways to work with the computer technology faculty to better align the MCT 103 requirement with program needs.
- The current process for students applying for life experience credit is perceived to be labor-intensive and slow. Collaborate with Student Services to refine the system for streamlining the student experience of receiving credit for prior work experience should be developed.

CURRICULUM FOCUSED

- Stacked courses are being examined within the context of student learning. Some of the lower level courses in most of the programs have been "unstacked" leaving mostly upper level courses in the stacked format.
- New degree options exist for a discreet industrial distribution option and a one-year certificate in the same field.
- Explore further development of the competency-based curriculum and program packaging around the attainment of competencies to meet different student needs.

PARTNERSHIP RICH

- Focus on strengthening partnerships for program expansion in Fremont for Industrial Maintenance and Welding.
- Focus on strengthening relationships with Omaha Public Schools in all manufacturing trades programs and maximizing Tech Prep articulations.

INCLUSIVE CULTURE

- Explore coordinated approach to program promotion for the entire department. Investigate virtual tour of campuses on CD-ROM and Internet. Create target marketing for Hispanic populations in South Omaha.

LEARNER CENTERED

- Study adjacencies for all three programs. Investigate storage systems and ventilation issues for Welding; explore the model of a large stationary lab with mobile equipment for on-site training for Industrial Maintenance; investigate co-locating Drafting and Precision Machine labs for the benefit of students.

Sample

Nursing

~ Learning is Our Purpose ~

Planning Guidesheet 2001-2003

Associate Degree Licensed Practical Nursing

MISSION DRIVEN

- Collaborative scheduling with general education areas, particularly the sciences, is essential for students. Due to National League for Nursing requirements, the actual number hours of nursing hours in the ASN program are limited. Review the relationship and need of some general education requirements at the College as they relate to the nursing programs.
- Continue to build on the strong relationship with student services related to students with special needs. Investigate the possibility of administering the Nursing Entrance Test (NET) online.

CURRICULUM FOCUSED

- The LPN program will need to undergo complete curriculum revision during the next three years per state requirements.
- ASN 111 medical terminology could be reviewed in relation to other medical terminology offerings at MCC in biology and office skills technology (possibly even online offerings).
- The ASN program is working with the Helene Fuld Trust grant to more fully integrate community-based nursing and wellness into the program.

PARTNERSHIP RICH

- Additional clinical sites are possible with a number of community agencies including Blair Hospital, Lutheran Home, the Ambassador, and others.
- Indian/Chicano health centers could also add clinicals with special needs for non-English speaking populations. Investigate possible partnerships with correctional facilities for both clinical and graduate placements.
- With additional clinical sites possible, pursue expanding base of part-time clinical instructors to revisit student/faculty ratio in clinicals.
- Consider expanding both LPN and ASN programs.

INCLUSIVE CULTURE

- Explore more customized professional development opportunities focused on nursing and health care.

LEARNER CENTERED

- ASN 160 Pharmacology is currently offered as a mixed mode course; ASN 151 is available online, and ASN 250 Issues and Trends is recommended for future online development. Other alternative delivery possibilities may emerge as the LPN curriculum is revised. Additional mixed mode, online and weekend offerings will be explored.